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ABSTRACT

The FLITE (Family Literacy Involvement Through Education) program is a partnership between a public school in the Bronx, New York, and the City University of New York that brings together two federal funding streams (FAMILY FIRST: Family-School Partnership Program and Even Start) to provide adult literacy, parenting education, and early childhood education in a family literacy context. The program features home visits, parenting workshops, staff development to continue educational growth of program workers; and for parents, basic education and English for speakers of other languages. Four case studies describing FLITE through the eyes of the families illustrate the following: the program's benefits for children, the value of its multiple points of entry, the uses to which participants put literacy, and reciprocal learning relationships. The success of the program is attributed to the following factors: employing women from the community as family workers; extended opportunities for examining real-life issues and questions; comprehensiveness and flexibility, reflecting the diversity of participant aspirations; and the responsiveness and fluidity of staff development. (Contains 22 references) (KC)

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NOT A ONE-WAY STREET

THE POWER OF RECIPROCITY IN FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAMS

KAREN GRISWOLD

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Not a One-Way Street

The Power of Reciprocity in Family Literacy Programs

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1997

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Introduction

The words "family literacy" have become a familiar phrase in educational literature and political speeches. Policymakers, researchers, and practitioners continue to call for more attention to the critical role of the family in setting and supporting the course for their children's school achievement and economic success. But what do family literacy programs look like "on the ground?" How are they developed and implemented, and what can they count as their achievements? Through the voices of both participants and staff, this monograph tells the story of the Family Literacy Involvement Through Education (FLITE) program, a family literacy program located at Public School 40 in the Bronx, New York, from its inception in January 1994 through July 1996. We begin with an introduction to the FLITE program and an overview of some of the critical issues in family literacy. Four case studies provide a closer look at participants' experience in the FLITE program. We conclude with a discussion of the case studies, focusing on some of the issues involved in developing a successful family literacy program.

We hope that the FLITE story will be of interest to other practitioners in the area of family literacy and contribute to the work of those who are thinking of establishing such a program. We believe that the document will also be of special interest to those concerned with forming policy in the area.

Background

The FLITE program is a partnership between Community School District Seven and the Institute for Literacy Studies at Lehman College, The City University of New York. FLITE brings together two federal funding streams, FAMILY FIRST: Family-School Partnership Program and Even Start, to provide adult literacy, parenting education, and early childhood education in a family literacy context. The idea for initiating the program in District Seven came from Dr. Fran Levy, then Director of Instruction and Professional Development in the district. After many years of working

in schools, Fran Levy understood the importance of a family-based program with a particular emphasis on early childhood education.

In the process of developing the original proposals for the FAMILY FIRST: Family-School Partnership Program and Even Start, District Seven contacted the Institute for Literacy Studies for help in thinking about integrating adult literacy education and early childhood education. The district was already familiar with the Institute's work because of its involvement with the Elementary Teachers Network, an Institute project that focuses on literacy education and assessment in the primary grades.

Like most programs, FLITE has grown and changed throughout the several years of its existence. Staff currently describe seven program goals:

1. To build participants' self-esteem by validating their languages, cultures, capabilities, and identity as parents;
2. To provide participants with opportunities to understand and develop a range of perspectives on child- and literacy-development through interactions with others;
3. To assist participants in building community and forming networks;
4. To assist participants in becoming advocates for themselves and their children;
5. To assist participants in identifying their own goals and in developing plans to reach them;
6. To provide opportunities for participants to increase their skills in reading and writing; and
7. To help participants confirm their roles as the primary educators of their children and to provide opportunities for parents to learn the skills that will help their children do better in school

These goals continue to evolve as the program develops and as the needs of participants change.

The FLITE program currently includes several components directly involving participants: home visits, pre-school classes, adult education classes, and parenting workshops. The first year concentrated its program activities entirely on home visits and parenting classes. While adult education was a part of the home visit, no classes for adults were offered; we added classes in Basic Education (BE) and English for Speakers of

Other Languages (ESOL) during year two because participants wanted to broaden their own skills. We encouraged, although did not require, participation in as many program components as interests and schedules allowed.

When it began, the staff of the FLITE program consisted of Amy March, the program director, and Carmen Umpierre, the program coordinator. Two family workers, Gladys Castro and Marilyn LaRoche, and a program assistant, Vanessa Cartagena, were hired in May 1994. Three additional family workers, Daisy Aponte, Norma Ortega, and Maria Villanueva were hired in October 1994. In May 1995, Helen Crespo, a social worker, joined the staff to facilitate the parent workshops. Awilda Marquez was hired as a family worker in April 1996. During the three-year period described in this monograph, some staff members left the FLITE program to pursue other employment opportunities. Representing the Institute for Literacy Studies, we both worked with the program from its inception by providing staff and program development assistance and staffing and overseeing the adult education components and the program evaluation.

Public School 40, where the FLITE program was based during its first several years, is located in the Mott Haven area of the South Bronx, the poorest congressional district in the nation. Half the population of this district is unemployed and receives some form of government assistance. All of the 22 schools in the district receive services under ESEA Chapter One. Residents of the district tend to be young, with one out of every three citizens under 18. In addition, people in the district are highly mobile; 31% of the students do not remain in the same school for a full year. At any given time, approximately 200 families live in temporary housing located in the district and operated by the New York City Department of Homeless Services and private, non-profit organizations.

FLITE participants came from the Mott Haven community; they were predominantly Latina and African-American women, and initially were recruited door-to-door by the program's family workers. In order to be eligible to participate in the program, and according to the requirements of the federal grants, participants must have had a child under the age of eight.

The statistics we note here paint a picture of this community only in the broadest strokes. They don't portray the day-to-day experiences of individuals, such as FLITE participants, who strive for the best for their

children and themselves, and approach learning with energy and enthusiasm despite often difficult life situations.

FLITE as a Family Literacy Program

FLITE defines itself as a family literacy program. There is no universally accepted definition of family literacy, but the Family Literacy Commission of the International Reading Association describes it in this way:

> Family literacy encompasses the ways parents, children, and extended family members use literacy at home and in their community. Sometimes, family literacy occurs naturally during the routines of daily living and helps adults and children "get things done." These events might include using drawings or writings to share ideas; composing notes or letters to communicate messages; making lists; reading and following directions; or sharing stories and ideas through conversation, reading and writing. Family literacy may be initiated purposefully by a parent or may occur spontaneously as parents and children go about the business of their daily lives. Family literacy activities may also reflect the ethnic, racial, or cultural heritage of the families involved. (Morrow, Paratore, and Tracey, 1994)

Although few would doubt the family's critical role in education, the concept and funding of programs that are considered to be "family literacy" is relatively recent. Only over the past ten years have policymakers and funders expressed substantial interest in the area. (Auerbach, 1995) Nevertheless, the assumptions upon which many family literacy programs are based and the ways in which programs are implemented have been the subject of considerable debate in the field.

Family literacy programs can provide powerful opportunities for learning on the part of children and parents, but they need to be conscious in both their design and in the language their practitioners use to describe them. As both Auerbach and Fingeret have pointed out, family literacy programs can easily embody assumptions about teaching and learning that constitute what is frequently called the "deficit model," in which program participants are viewed as having some weakness or other liability that needs to be addressed. As Fingeret states:

> In the United States we are investing in "family literacy," which most often means mothers and their children; it is designed to break the cycle of illiteracy in which parents are described as handing down illiteracy to their children, as if a mother's inability to read and write well, and sometimes her children's is an artifact of her will, is a legacy she creates with no regard to the larger school systems her children must attend, or the lack of health care her children must live through. As if literacy somehow is responsible for good mothering. It is a profound injustice to women. Women are targeted and missiles sent home, your children will be failures unless you come to school and learn your lessons, we are told. (Fingeret, 1992)

In addition, many family literacy programs concentrate primarily on bringing school-like literacy activities into the home and may not acknowledge and build upon what is already taking place there. These programs, as Auerbach points out, assume that the school culture is the acknowledged and acceptable way of operating, and that consequently, change in the home must take place in order for children to advance in literacy. Several studies have established that a substantial number of families, including low-income families, minority families, and those families whose primary language is not English, care about and support their children's literacy development. (Delgado-Gaitan, 1987; Heath, 1983) Rather than placing blame on families, Auerbach encourages us to acknowledge the role of social and political factors that can make life difficult for low-income families. (Auerbach, 1995)

Although we worked consciously against a deficit model of literacy at the FLITE program, it, like similar programs, shows some evidence of a deficit model of literacy as well as of a participatory one, in which genuine knowledge of the participants' families and cultures influences the program design. The ideas behind the deficit model are so deeply embedded in the culture and practice of schooling that is hard to get away from them. In this country, as Fingeret points out, not achieving literacy is frequently considered an individual failing rather than a societal issue. Consciously or unconsciously, program participants and program staff often find themselves using the language of both frameworks alternately or simultaneously. Because of this, it is important for programs continually to ask questions of themselves and to examine the messages that their program activities communicate to participants.

Another point of interest in relation to family literacy is that while talking, reading, and writing exist in various social contexts such as the

family, the school, the workplace, and the community, these settings offer fewer and fewer opportunities for what Shirley Brice Heath calls "literate behaviors." As she discusses in *The Fourth Vision*, a literate behavior provides the opportunity for extended and ongoing conversations around texts. Being literate, says Heath, means being able to

> ...talk with and listen with others, to interpret texts, say what they mean, link them to personal experience and with other texts, argue with them and make predictions from them, develop future scenarios, compare and evaluate related situations, and know that the practice of all these literate abilities is practical. (Heath, 1990)

When Heath describes the changes in family and community structures that have reduced the opportunities for literate behaviors, she is referring to changes that cut across the social and economic spectrum of the country. These changes include the shifts in work and child-care patterns (e.g., more working parents and more time spent at work) that have affected opportunities for literate behaviors traditionally associated with religious institutions, community events, and family life.

Despite these great changes, family literacy programs have the potential to create their own opportunities for literate behaviors when they are structured in ways that are responsive to their participants' needs and interests. They also can help supply a foundation and the encouragement to value and pursue similar literacy-related interactions with children and other adults in their lives in non-school settings.

A well-designed family literacy program offers participants multiple entry points. One parent might join a program with the specific purpose of helping a child. Another entry point might be an adult's own educational goals, which could include a General Educational Development (GED) certification or improving one's reading and writing. Program participants might also be seeking a compatible group of people to discuss issues they face in raising children.

Regardless of the way in which a participant enters the program, she or he has the opportunity to join a forum in which literate behavior is possible, an arena in which life issues are explored through talking, reading, and writing. The program's home visits can help mothers learn to work with their children. Both the ESOL and BE classes provide purposeful learning around issues that are important to participants. The

parenting workshops offer a forum for discussing issues about child-rearing. And the importance of purposes and contexts for literate behaviors is not limited to program participants; the FLITE staff engage in weekly discussions about their work in the homes with families and regularly explore opportunities to develop their understandings of themselves as readers and writers.

The following description of the FLITE program structure illustrates some of the opportunities for participants to interact with each other through talk, reading, and writing.

The FLITE Program Structure

Home Visits

Home visits were one of the two original components of the FLITE program when it began in January 1994. The originators of the program conceived them as a way of reaching families who tended not to use the services available in the community, and the home visits created a bridge between the home and the program's school-based parenting workshops. While home visits are a mandated ingredient of federally-funded Even Start programs, FLITE home visits differed conceptually from those of other family literacy models, which employ the home visit as a structure for intermittently assessing participants' educational and social service needs and often follow a set curriculum. We designed FLITE home visits to function as routine contexts for parent-child interactions which focus on talk, reading, and writing. As such, home visits use the home as a learning center in which to develop literacy opportunities.

To date, the FLITE program has a roster of approximately thirty-five families that receive weekly, one-hour home visits. During these visits, family-workers often engage parents and children in developmentally appropriate early childhood projects, such as planting seeds or cooking, to encourage literacy development. Some FLITE mothers comment on what they have learned through the home visits:

> *You know, many times I just didn't know what to do with my kid. With the home visits I learned how important reading and talking to children is. Our family worker always had fun activities to do. I know I wouldn't be doing this kind of activity if I weren't in this program.*

And:

> *I learned how important it is to make time to talk or read with my child. I never thought of this as helping someone to read.*

At other times during the visits, the family workers engage the parents in more formal reading and writing activities, such as reading literature

and writing in journals. One parent recalls her experience reading with her family worker, Gladys Castro:

> *I used to hate to read but one day Gladys she loaned me a book. It was so interesting. So then I started to read... Oh, I forgot the title but it was a "juicy" book, I call them juicy books. It was interesting! So I started reading it and I said, "give me another book."*

As they design and develop the home visits, the family workers try to build on the interests of the families. To do this, family workers document and describe their experiences with parents and children for staff development sessions, which help individual staff members to expand their understandings through the group's perspectives. The group also uses these descriptions to recommend future educational directions for the family worker.

We regarded the home visit as a literacy context from the outset of the program; the idea of building on the interests and strengths of the participants to create an educational context developed as the program evolved. Early in FLITE's development, we considered some early childhood and family literacy models, such as the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) and the Mother-Child Home Program (MCHP). HIPPY was developed to prepare children for successful school experiences; during home visits, the program uses prepared lessons and worksheets that concentrate on such areas as language, problem-solving, sorting, and grouping. (HIPPY USA, 1990) MCHP aims to modify the early cognitive experiences of economically disadvantaged pre-school children. It provides activities for structured verbal interactions between parent and child, focusing on toys and books. (Levenstein, 1988)

In keeping with the idea that homes and families are themselves contexts for literacy, FLITE staff decided not to use a pre-packaged curriculum for home visits. Instead, staff work to create an emerging model that is specific to the experiences and interests of the participants. An example of how we focus on the individual in order to develop the program can be seen in one family worker's encounter with a father who wanted to participate in the home visits, but could not read or write. The family worker encouraged the father to tape his stories on a tape recorder and ask his wife to write them down. In the meantime, the family worker

found a wordless picture book, brought it to the home, and invited the father to tell the story to his child based on the pictures they viewed together. Here, the family worker was able to apply her understanding of a staff development session that focused on how the emergent reader's knowledge and experience can be linked to a variety of literacy events.

This particular home visit illustrates several aspects of FLITE's approach to literacy and learning: 1) the range of purposes for literate behaviors is broad. In this case, the parent wanted to engage with his child in a storytelling activity; 2) learning experiences can be generative. Rather than bringing pre-defined tools, such as worksheets, into the home, the family worker tried to meet the needs of this specific family; and, 3) learning does not have to be an individual experience. This home visit established an opportunity for shared learning in which the parent, child, and family worker worked together to create new meaning and understanding.

In the program's second year, as the idea that learning can develop through social interactions became more central to staff's understandings, we created monthly three-hour workshops focusing on reading and writing for home-visit parents. Staff decided to establish these workshops when they realized the potential value of moving the sharing of stories from the home to a larger arena. In this way, the idea of creating a community of adult learners led to the development of a new context for literacy. Carmen Umpierre, the home visit coordinator, describes one of these home visit get-togethers:

> *We had a recipe-sharing theme. Our home-visit families were all invited. Some families made their dishes, others shared recipes, and all tasted what had been cooked. Families wrote about their special dishes and shared their interests in the diversity of culture. They asked about each other's country and talked about where they were located on maps, of the different festivities that their countries were known for.*
>
> *Some of the fathers discussed their interest in fishing and their knowledge of fresh fish and what they see at the market. During these get-togethers, the families were capable of building networks where friendships were established.*

Gatherings such as this one provided staff and participants with a forum for sharing experiences and perspectives about themselves through

storytelling, cooking, reading, and writing. These gatherings influenced staff's thinking about the design of home visits in general. Their deepening belief in the power of co-constructing knowledge in social networks is evident in their plans for the 1996-1997 program year; they decided to develop and offer more frequent and fluid opportunities for home-visit families to come together at the school. As these get-togethers address the issues and experiences of the adults, home visits increasingly focus on the parent-child interactions that surround the young child's emergent literacy.

Parenting Workshops

Parenting workshops were the second component that made up FLITE's original program design. The program established weekly two-hour workshops in English and Spanish at P.S. 40 and the Jackson Family Residence, a transitional housing facility in the P.S. 40 neighborhood. The relationship with the Jackson Family Residence was established in 1994 in conjunction with efforts made by District Seven's Attendance Improvement Dropout Prevention program to reach out to the district's growing homeless population.

The parenting workshops provided another opportunity to establish a literacy context while practically addressing parents' needs and their interactions with their children. At the beginning, the FLITE director, Amy March, facilitated these workshops and focused on such areas as health, stress, discipline, and cooking. During the program's first year, Claudia Ullman worked with Amy to integrate reading and writing into a series of cooking workshops at the Jackson Family Residence. We introduced a variety of cookbooks to encourage participants to broaden their cooking experiences, to familiarize themselves with various cookbook formats, and to try new recipes. The participants then wrote and published their own recipes which included the histories of the dishes they created. A comment from a focus group with Spanish-speaking parents describes the parenting workshops:

> *We have learned a great deal: how to cook, how to make flowers. The most I like is that they teach us how to educate our*

kids. It is important because they teach many things we weren't taught about raising kids. I have really learned how to take care of my kids, how to cook for them, how to play with them, how to teach them. They just give so much information. You know when you do not have work it is important to have something to look forward to. Something to keep your mind busy.

In September 1995, Helen Crespo, a licensed social worker, joined the FLITE program as the parenting instructor. She describes her hopes for the parenting workshops in the following interview comment:

One of my main goals is to have the parents stop and reflect on themselves as parents. To think of their children individually. To think about what it means to be a mother or father. To give them some information on parenting from other perspectives so that they can think about what might work for them if they are not happy with what is happening now.

Since the collective knowledge of the group is greater than the knowledge of any one individual, workshop participants are able to enrich and extend their understandings through the sharing of experiences. In the same spirit of the home visits, the parenting workshops began to use the situations parents encounter in their daily lives with their children as a foundation for the evolving curriculum. Conversation provides a means to explore early childhood development and parenting; reading articles, journal writing, and exploring children's literature build on these discussions.

Many FLITE participants are single parents faced with the loneliness and challenges of raising children alone. The program's parenting component offers a place in which they can come together and discuss the ups and downs of raising children, or the confusion that parents who are new to the United States often feel as they encounter educational and social service systems.

The experiences described by a mother who is a recent immigrant from the Dominican Republic are explained by her family worker:

She [says she] felt bad when she first got here because she thought that her problems were just her problems. But then after she started to get to know everyone, she realized that it

wasn't only her problem. ...She thought it was something really big to her, but she realized there were even bigger problems when she heard people sharing about their kids in the parenting class.

As the following comment from a member of the Spanish-speaking focus group indicates, the parenting workshop can serve simply as a vehicle for bringing people together to create new, shared experiences:

Well, I think they want to help us take care of our children. They talk about how we can help our children to read or show them interesting things. I know from last year they do trips in the summer to parks and museums and places where the children can have fun and also see something of this world. Those things help us. It gives us something to do. They pay for everything. This is a big help.

The ideas here express the impact that the group has on the individual's learning. Strickland and Taylor (1989) note that "individual interpretations" emerge when the individual engages in learning on a personal level. And when the individuals bring their "interpretations" to a group for sharing, the conversations in the group contribute to and deepen the learning. Further, the dynamic of the group can have as much of an influence on the parent's learning as the subject matter does. Helen Crespo speaks to this point in the following comment:

A lot of the identity of our participants centers around their role as parent. There is not much support for parents in this community, or even in our society as a whole. There is a lot of isolation and secrecy. I think it gives them self-esteem to be involved in a group and feel empowered...When they begin to feel good about themselves as parents in the group, they begin to move on in other parts of their lives. So that they realize they are more than "just mothers."

FLITE parenting workshops create a literacy context in which parents can share and discuss their experiences. In addition, the group's members provide the individual parent with a variety of lenses through which to view her ideas, questions, and concerns.

Staff Development

The Institute for Literacy Studies has provided technical assistance to the FLITE program since the program's inception. Claudia Ullman has routinely met with the program director, home visit coordinator, parenting instructor, and family workers for weekly, extended staff development sessions. Staff development has emphasized the significance of making reading and writing meaningful and the ways in which staff's experiences and knowledge can create a framework for learning. In this way, staff development became a literacy context for the program's staff. Similar to the program's home- and center-based components, the staff development sessions evolve out of the staff's questions and observations about their work. Staff development has taken place in three stages which are interrelated in their emphases: 1) at the beginning, sessions concentrated on examining issues in adult literacy and strategies for incorporating reading and writing into home visits; 2) early in the program's development, the questions and issues about teaching and learning which arose from staff's daily work experiences became central to the staff development sessions; and, 3) in the program's third year the focus shifted to looking at the family workers' ideas for planning, implementation, and program design.

During the first two years of the program, staff development furnished opportunities for staff to engage in reading and writing in order to develop their understandings of themselves as readers and writers. At the outset the family workers, who are members of the community and have had varying educational experiences, did not perceive themselves as readers, writers, or teachers; some tended to view literacy as a series of isolated skills, and participatory staff development sessions were designed to invite staff to experience reading and writing as meaning-based processes. Year-one sessions were designed to help the staff feel more comfortable reading and writing. Cooperative activities that featured poetry and personal memories were designed to illustrate that everyone has something important to say and that the sharing of these experiences is an important part of the writing process. One family worker, Norma Ortega, speaks to this notion when she discusses introducing parents to writing:

It's to let them know that they're valued. That everything they know is valuable.

After six months, the family workers were beginning to feel more comfortable about their own reading and writing. Another family worker commented on how using a journal supported her growing confidence in writing. She says that she:

...gained the desire to learn more and take chances by exploring different avenues...writing was one of my biggest struggles. Staff development became an enjoyable haven, an arena for each of us to learn, teach, and explore without consequence.

Their reading and responding to literature also prompted staff to share their own stories and experiences during these staff development sessions. Selected to stress that learning is active and that texts have multiple interpretations (Edelsky, Altwerger, and Flores, 1991), the readings focused on growing up in urban settings and on family life, and included selections by: Piri Thomas, Jamaica Kincaid, Sandra Cisneros, Jose Torres, Susan Griffin, Eloise Greenfield, Madeleine L'Engle, Sharon Olds, and Maya Angelou. In discussing the texts, staff used writing to explore their own experiences and remembrances. All the family workers interviewed remember their surprise at being asked to participate in personal literacy experiences as part of their employment in the FLITE program. One family worker comments:

I was told that it was a literacy program...it involved reading and writing, but I didn't realize that I would be involved in all this [reading and writing through staff development]. But of course, if you are going to teach somebody else, you have to go through it yourself.

The family workers shared many of the hesitancies and inhibitions that the families they worked with experienced. Staff's own experiences with reading and writing enabled them to relate on an immediate and personal level with the families they served, and allowed them to be particularly sensitive to families' needs and struggles. One family worker commented on her developing understanding of the reciprocal relationship between learning and teaching:

I use our own stories that we write. Parents like it and they [say] "WOW - the staff is doing this too" and [the parent] enjoyed being able to choose something from someone that she more or less knows, as opposed to some author that she's never heard of. I also shared a story that I wrote about my name. I wrote the story and went through the process...to revise and all that. And then I shared it and they [the parents] were looking like "WOW! I have to write because she is showing me the stuff she does!"

Amy March, the program's director, described the staff development process as:

...terrific at really moving the family workers in a very conscious but slow way to a different perspective around their own feelings as readers and writers. And this has sparked them to want to read. It has also really changed their view of children [to] little people that we can really learn a lot from. I was very impressed at the quality of assessments that they have made of families.

In a process that paralleled the creation of FLITE's program components, the staff development sessions evolved out of the staff's work with families. During the program's first year the sessions employed journal writing about staff's home visit experiences to focus them on observing, describing, and reflecting. The journal entries enabled us to examine the issues and questions staff raised about their work. Staff maintained their journals in dialogue with Claudia Ullman, and the journals became a literacy context for thinking about teaching. One family worker reflects in her journal:

I went back and took a look at my journal writing. As I was going over it I realized many different things. The first thing I realized was less writing at the beginning...it was hard to start writing—I didn't really feel confident; there was some kind of intimidation at the beginning. I would just document about the nursery class or about my [home visits] because I would see it as an obligation. Now I see it differently. I see my writing has improved very much; I think the different kinds of writing we are doing has made the difference. I really enjoy writing to my partner or writing stories about my childhood. The main part about this development is that now I feel like I'm writing to a friend and not just documenting.

The entry illustrates several aspects of literacy and learning in the context of staff development. This family worker recognizes that there are different types of literacy behaviors and different purposes for writing—here the writing of personal stories, the description of events and situations related to work, and the expression of ideas in partnership with others. In addition, she notes the importance of social interaction in her development as a writer, that literacy and learning can be "social events" rather than "solitary endeavors." (Strickland and Taylor, 1989)

As FLITE evolved, staff became increasingly involved in directions for their own development as well as their work with families. Toward the end of the program's second year, family workers requested more planning time for their work, and this request shaped the third aspect of staff development: working individually and as a group to plan and share ideas for home visits. Illuminating the idea that critical thinking and problem-posing are essential to learning (Edelsky, Altwerger, and Flores, 1991), staff raised questions about the materials they use and the ways they work in the participants' homes. They began to use this time to discuss the decisions and choices they made in their work.

One result of these discussions was the staff's agreement, at the start of the fourth year, that reading, writing, and remembrances are more fun to create and share in a group. They decided to modify the program's structure to redesign the home visit get-togethers. The family workers' growing involvement in the program's development is based largely in how their description, observation, and documentation of their experiences helped them to shape their work. Because the staff experienced the process of exploring their own learning, they were comfortable helping others do so.

At first staff grappled with the notion of teaching and were uncomfortable taking the lead in home visits as the "teacher." From interviews and staff meetings, it was clear that they had certain preconceptions about what teaching was; they did not want to be seen as authority figures, or as women who had "knowledge" to dispense to the parents, for the family workers considered them to be their peers. As one family worker, Marilyn La Roche, states:

> *I tend to think of school days and that person in front of the blackboard who is writing. Memorizing things, getting things down. Here, I learned that I don't have to copy what someone else does, but that I can develop my own mind.*

Today family workers see their role as equal members of a shared community, and as learners along with the families they serve. Another family worker comments on beginning to reconceive her concept of being a teacher:

> *I wrote in my journal that one thing that I realized was that we were all teachers. We learn from children, children learn from us. It's not a one-way street, it's a back and forth.*

Norma Ortega echoes this idea when she describes her role as a family worker:

> *I also learn from these parents, a lot. I just go as a sharer. I go to share my knowledge and to pick up on theirs.*

This educational growth of the family workers in tandem with that of the families is a unique aspect of the FLITE program.

The Preschool Classroom

In order to respond to the needs of the parents who were attending the adult education and parenting classes, FLITE established a preschool classroom for their children ages 2.9 through 4, beginning in September 1994. The preschool classroom also supports the program's home visit component by way of providing additional opportunities for FLITE staff to observe and interact with the children in another context. Amy March says:

> *Since many of the children attend the preschool class and receive home visits, they have an opportunity to experience the books and activities both in their own home with their parent and in the classroom with the stimulation and conversation inspired by other children and adults. When the story book was introduced during circle time the other day, one child called out, "That's my book!" The children are thrilled when they recognize the connections between home and school and the chances for repetition, so important to young children, encourage both competence and self-confidence.*

Ultimately, however, the preschool classroom provides young children of FLITE parents with learning experiences in a group setting. In this way, it creates a literacy context for young children which differs from that of the home visit. The preschool class follows a developmentally appropriate curriculum which respects the deep-seated and powerful need of young children to explore and understand their surroundings and their relationships with others. The classroom is arranged in traditional preschool centers, designed to encourage individual and collaborative learning. It includes a block area; a house corner/fire station; a grocery store/doctor's office; an art area; a water/sand table; a comfortable book area with a wide assortment of children's books; and an area filled with puzzles and open-ended construction toys. The multi-age grouping of the preschool classroom allows children of different ages to work together and learn from one another.

A central feature of the preschool classroom is the regular work-play period, during which children are encouraged to use the classroom's various materials and activities to pursue their own ideas and interests. During the hour of uninterrupted work-play time, FLITE staff provide a special project that includes introductions to a new art medium, cooking experiences, and science experiments. The work-play time offers children further opportunities to initiate learning, and allows staff to observe them at work and play in order to understand their interests and needs, facilitate their efforts to use and experiment with materials, and support their communication and interactions.

The preschool classroom fulfills the goals of the FLITE program in various ways, particularly in supporting children's emerging literacy skills. The program's broad definition of literacy and pre-reading skills addresses areas of the whole child's development (including social relationships, large and fine motor skills, and conceptual understandings of shapes, colors, letters) as well as story reading and language development. Since research indicates that school-age children who have difficulty with academic skills often display early language delay (Zill, Collins, West, and Hausken, 1995), we use opportunities throughout the day to create linkages between the children's work in the classroom and reading and conversing. During circle time, the children sing, read, and share events from their lives. Snack time is an important opportunity for children, staff, and volunteer parents to engage in informal conversations with each other. Finally, the children spend time outside, where they use

climbing equipment, balls, water painting, and large chalk. During the winter months, the children used an indoor portable climbing apparatus and other large-motor equipment. Amy March describes the integration of working, playing, reading, and speaking:

> *Many conversations take place during the work period as staff encourage dramatic play, engage with children in "telephone conversations," and discuss with children their block buildings or works of art. Besides being read to every day, the children are often encouraged to turn to books to find out more about classroom projects, such as the metamorphoses of caterpillars, to enrich dramatic play as they pretend to be firefighters, and to hear a favorite story again.*

FLITE further supports children's language development through its design as a dual-language classroom. Some of the children attending the preschool classroom have English-speaking parents attending the BE class and others have Spanish-speaking parents who attend the ESOL class. Staff in the preschool classroom include one teacher who speaks Spanish and English and one who speaks only English. In response to research indicating the importance of early language development in a child's native language (Garcia, 1995), children in the preschool classroom are encouraged to express themselves in their native language. At the same time, they have opportunities to learn another language as they engage in collaborative learning experiences throughout the day.

The Adult Education Classes

Basic Education classes at FLITE were taught by Azi Ellowitch, who also taught GED classes at the Adult Learning Center at Lehman College. The classes were mixed-level (fairly beginning through GED), and included a wide range of students. ESOL classes were taught by Lucia De La Cruz and Carmen Villa-Lugo.

Azi Ellowitch describes her perspective on the group:

> *To me, there is no bigger goal than to have people recognize their own intelligence. To me, that is the bottom line. And if they get their GED along the way, that's fine. I think that seeing*

themselves as readers, seeing themselves as capable, envisioning reading and writing as part of their lives is the goal: take a book to read on the train.

The BE class includes a wide selection of texts, both fiction and nonfiction, with special emphasis on multi-cultural literature, so that the group explores issues that arise for families in various cultures and contexts. The texts included "Thank You M'am," by Langston Hughes; "Girl," by Jamaica Kincaid; and "I Stand Here Ironing," by Tillie Olsen.

Nonfiction included "Three Generations of Native American Women's Birth Experience," by Joy Harjo; "Teachers Expectancies: Determinates of Pupils' I.Q. Gains" from *Forty Studies that Changed Psychology*, edited by Roger Hock; and "The Girl across the Tracks—Sarah Palmer," from *American Dreams Lost and Found*, edited by Studs Terkel.

The range of texts provides opportunities for discussion and exploration of issues common to parents. Azi Ellowitch used writing and discussion as ways for students to think about some of the issues raised by the texts and to examine their own experiences in relation to them. Here is an excerpt from one of her assignments:

> Look back at the parts of the reading you found most interesting. Choose one, write the first and last words of the quote, as well as the page and page position. Then write your personal reaction to this passage. What does it bring up for you in your own experience? What about her story do you have strong feelings about? Your feelings cannot be wrong. The idea here is to express them clearly.

Exploring another text, "The Boy without a Flag" by Abraham Rodriquez, Jr., provided an opportunity to examine some of the tensions that can arise for parents and children around societal rules. In this story, a boy refuses to salute the United States flag, believing that because he is Puerto Rican the flag represents an imperialist nation, a belief that he is certain his father supports. When his father comes to school, however, he sides with the principal on the issue of following school rules. In discussing and writing about the story, the class examined some of the painful contradictions parents face, such as "How do we encourage dreams but also encourage kids to be realistic?"

In the ESOL class, the participants' concerns and issues also create a context for language development. During the first year of the ESOL

class, news events, political issues, and their socio-economic implications formed the foundation for discussions. As Lucia De La Cruz, the ESOL instructor that year, describes it:

> *Much of the class was also aimed at clarifying the everyday situations they face. We have to understand that they are not just students; they are also parents of small children, some with disabilities, tenants with difficult landlords, budding entrepreneurs, and most of all, people who believe in the American dream at a time when this dream is slipping.*

The participants used discussion, reading, and writing to investigate various life situations common to their experience as parents and new immigrants.

In the second year of the ESOL class, then taught by Carmen Villa-Lugo, the curriculum once again came from the issues the participants raised. The class explored such topics as women's health concerns and medical practices, domestic violence and child abuse, and children's health and development. The participants' concerns also provided a vehicle for language development. As Carmen Villa-Lugo observes:

> *The foremost goal is for them to speak English. But you have to look at other goals, because they don't live in a vacuum. Being a Latina in the neighborhood is not easy, so language is not the only barrier. I interject all kinds of things, ranging from building self-esteem to assertiveness to defense. They face discrimination on account of not being American, and being new to this culture, and having a totally different upbringing. It is pretty complicated, but I narrow it down to basics, and also share with them things that I know to be different with this culture that are not necessarily bad.*

Both the BE and ESOL classes provided the participants with a forum in which to exchange ideas on issues of critical importance, while continuing to develop their skills in discussion, reading, and writing. As time passed, staff members became aware that adult literacy education is an even more critical part of a family literacy effort than they had first imagined. As Amy March notes:

> *The primary purpose when we started was to help parents learn the skills necessary to help their kids before they come to school. I had not been involved in family literacy but I was*

involved with parents very closely through my early childhood education experience. I wanted to do much more intensive work with parents around the question of young children and parenting and literacy. My goals have changed the most in that I see very much now that where we have been able to grab parents has been around their own learning. I think the people we have made the biggest impact on have been the ones who have really caught fire with their own education, either through BE or ESOL.

In discussing the importance of designing programs which use the social issues in participants' lives as contexts for literacy learning, Auerbach (1995) points out the need for curriculum to "empower participants to direct their own learning and use it for their own purposes." FLITE's premise that parents' learning could be addressed through a context of parenting and child development expanded to include the needs and aspirations of parents as individuals. The BE and ESOL classes, while supporting participants as readers, writers, and speakers of English, also helped them forge linkages among literacy, learning, and their lives.

Case Studies: FLITE through the Eyes of the Families

The FLITE people are like part of your family. They don't look down on you. This is one of those programs where people are looking to help you in any way they can. FLITE is a huge support system. If one can't do something then the next one will.

—Zena Garcia, a FLITE mother

Four FLITE Families

The following four case studies offer glimpses into the lives of the FLITE participants. They illustrate various ways in which participants entered the program, the uses to which they put literacy, and the benefits their children received. The families described here volunteered to participate in this process, and FLITE staff then chose to focus on those that would offer different perspectives on each aspect of the program. Participants' writing is reproduced here as it was written. The names of the participants have been changed to protect their privacy.

Luz Marquez

Luz Marquez, a petite, vibrant, 33-year-old mother of three and her husband, Alberto, live in a struggling yet vitally intense block adjacent to P.S. 40. She is constantly on guard, protecting her two daughters and son from the everyday hazards of drugs, physical violence, crumbling dwellings, and generally depressed surroundings. She spends much of her time on the normal routines of motherhood, such as fixing lunch and caring for her children; she also devotes time to securing workable school drinking fountains and ensuring that her neighbor's children receive proper medical care. Such basic services cannot be taken for granted in Luz's neighborhood.

Luz's involvement in the FLITE program began in October 1994 when she enrolled herself and her two-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, in the program for home visits. She liked the idea of having a teacher who came to her home. In an early journal entry from one of the first home visits, Luz wrote:

> Today the teacher she's reading to Elizabeth, her student, and is great, know we are playing with the block teaching her the colors, and she loves learning the colors, counting the number. Well know Elizabeth is reading to her teacher, she is learning a lot very fast, like I told you this is a great program, for the kids, I will participate in what ever I have to, Today we are treming the tree Elizabeth is helping us, I'll let you know what happens OK.

Carmen Villa-Lugo, the FLITE ESOL teacher, explains that in the community FLITE serves, women who pursue their own education often challenge the conventional norms of their culture in terms of traditional gender roles. To be successful, it is important to link literacy services to the participant's role as mother. It was Luz's intense sense of responsibility for her children and their future that propelled her involvement in the FLITE program. Amy March underscores the commitment parents have to their children when she describes reaching out to parents by:

> *providing an opening for adults to become excited about learning, through their kids first and then through their own learning. To have a community of friends. There is no question that we get the parents through the kids.*

Luz wants her children to have a different life than she had when she was growing up. In response to a FLITE entry questionnaire that asked "How would you like your child's education to be different from yours?", she answered:

> *I would like my children to go to school and love it 'cause I used to go to school but I did not like the work.*

From the beginning Luz was an active, motivated participant in the FLITE program. Her willingness to grow as a mother pushed her forward on her own learning journey. While she remembers reading as having been

"boring" in school, she describes how the FLITE family workers helped it come alive for her during the home visits. For Luz, reading has became a shared experience that now is a part of her life:

> *Gladys read to me and I read to her, that's how we started. She used to read one paragraph and then I would read one paragraph. So then every time she used to visit my daughter I would say, "Don't forget to bring a book for us!" When she was finished working with my daughter, we used to share 10-15 minutes of reading.*
>
> *I never was interested in reading. It was like boring for me. They made it exciting. I read to you, now you read to me. That made it more exciting. Most of the time I don't read alone, I read with my husband or I read with my older daughter. She reads a paragraph and I read a paragraph.*

In conversation, Luz explains that she viewed the family worker not only as a teacher, but as a woman from the community whom she could trust. The family worker played a variety of different roles. She encouraged Luz to enroll in the BE classes, assuring her that the FLITE staff would care for Elizabeth in a safe and exciting nursery room; thus, she was also the link for Luz's daughter to become active in the on-site early childhood program. Coupled with encouragement from the FLITE staff, Luz's desire to "be there" for her kids was also an important link in her involvement with other components of the program. She described the impetus for joining the BE class:

> *Well, I couldn't help [my children]. Like my daughter used to come and show me her book and there were big words and I didn't know. Before I started FLITE my oldest daughter came up to me and she had a math problem, I couldn't help her—felt so stupid. Everything just blanked out, and I went to school to 11th grade. I couldn't help her. It made me feel so bad. And as soon as I found out they had classes here, I joined. Days went by and my daughter came up to me and now she is in the 6th grade. And I did it! I was able to help her with her math problems! I was more excited than her—but I was happy to help her because you know, it's so bad if you can't help your kids.*

Luz notes how her own educational experiences in the FLITE program gave her the confidence to help her daughter:

You know they say that if you read to your kids when they are little, when your kids grow up they will read to their kids and they will love to read. My kids didn't used to be reading, so when I started reading to them and them reading to me, things changed. I see my daughter, she comes home from the library reading a book and I think "Oh, Lord, she is reading a book!" It got her enthusiasm in reading. I keep coming to this class and now I like to read. I read to her and now she reads to her brother.

Luz describes her evolution as a reader and the effect that literacy had in changing family traditions in her household:

Before the kids go to sleep, I didn't use to read to them. I read to them now. Even the big one, she is 12, she says, "Mom, read something for me." It's exciting because I didn't used to do stuff like this. I like it. So every night I read something to each one of them, a little something.

Her reading affected her relationship with her husband:

I'm telling you, I got a book in bed, and he said "I'm so proud of you, read to me!" Then he got excited and I got a stack of books and he picked up handyman carpentry stuff. Before he never read it and now he is like, "This is my page, I am up to this." He didn't even used to buy the newspaper. Now he is buying the newspaper, you see him reading...the Daily News. Reading the newspaper and watching the news. We didn't used to be watching the news. It's good to know about the news, what happens here, what happens there. It never really interested me, but now everybody in the house is reading. Even the little one, she is the one that kind of got everything started.

Luz's words show how reading gradually became a part of family interactions and traditions during the family's three-year involvement in FLITE. Her eyes light up and her voice races with excitement as she describes the many kinds of informal learning experiences that now take place in her home.

When she first entered the parenting class, Luz was struggling with her seven-year-old-son, Bernardo. After she discussed with FLITE staff a problem he was having in the school lunchroom, she communicated her distress about his behavior in written form in her BE journal. By sharing her problems this way, she received feedback from the parenting instruc-

tor and the BE teacher, who also encouraged her to speak with the program director, an early childhood specialist. Eventually she was able to address the problem with her son and his teacher. Later that month, in March 1996, she wrote in her BE journal:

> Today I feel very happy cause I had a conversation about my son [with her husband] so we agree that we both will pitch in and help him with what ever it is so we had a nice talk and I feel much better. I am planning to send my son and daughter to Florida this summer, maybe getting away from the block it will be good for both of them to spend some time with there grandparents over there...my son has been behaving very well lately his teacher told me that he has been listening and paying attention in class so that's why I've been happy cause when any of my kids do good in school it makes me happy.

In this way, many of the issues Luz discusses in the parenting workshops become the focus of her writing experiences in the BE class. Her personal experience creates a context for learning. She also tries using the journal as a communication tool between herself and her teenage daughter when tempers flare:

> *Me and the family worker was doing it [journal writing], and me and the GED teacher was doing it and I thought, hmm, me and my daughter could do the same thing. 'Cause sometimes she's got a lot to say and it makes me angry if she say it to me. So I tell her "If I scold you and you are angry, go in your room and write it down and I will answer you back. Please write it down." And it worked, you see her coming out much better.*

Explaining that she learned how important communication was in the program's parenting workshops, Luz recalls her own memories of fighting with her mother and says she is trying hard not to repeat this cycle in her family.

During her first year's involvement with FLITE, Luz participated in home visits and parenting workshops. It took her some time to feel comfortable joining the BE class. Azi Ellowitch, the BE teacher, discusses Luz's journey as a learner:

> *During the fall and winter, 1994-95, Luz would often visit the family workers, whose offices were next to the classroom, and look into the class. Luz was reticent to join the class. When she*

did she quickly became one of its most consistent, cooperative, and hard-working students.

In March Luz wrote:

> Well, I haven't read for a while, but my Daughter's teacher [FLITE family worker] got me ...into reading, she lone me a book and I started reading again.

In June 1995, Luz began to see herself as a reader and a writer:

> I like to read action books and I read sometimes at night time. When I feel down, I write about myself thing in mind. I write in the night time, when everybody is sleeping, that's when I write.

Now Luz's husband jokes that she is never home to fix him lunch because she "is always at the school." She is comfortable in the school environment and says that FLITE "is like a second home." Having teachers who listen to her, who answer her journal questions and stories, and who take her concerns seriously have given her the context she needed to share her experiences and affirm her role as parent and learner.

The FLITE program uses many informal strategies such as family get-togethers, an annual street fair, and awards ceremonies to help build a learning community among the participating families. Luz notes:

> *I hardly never used to come outside. I would drop my kids off [at the school] and go back home. I was kind of bored. I was always cooped up in the house because I don't like to be hanging out. So I stayed at home. But since joining FLITE, forget it, it was good because I don't like to go places by myself, you know, you want to talk and I feel uncomfortable. But as soon as they started making trips I was always there. It felt good. I felt much better on trips. I spoke to the girls and the ladies from FLITE.*

The sense of community that engaged Luz was critical to her success. The informal bonds created by program staff were as important to her literacy development as her sitting down to read during a home visit. She speaks passionately about her hopes and dreams for her family, and the successes they have achieved since their involvement in the FLITE program.

Zena Garcia

Zena Garcia first became involved in the program when her daughter brought home a flyer about it from school. Her first interest was in the home visiting component, but she soon became involved in the parenting workshops. A tall, sturdy woman with deep brown eyes and smooth skin, Zena is a single parent of six children between the ages of 4 and 16. She has a fine sense of humor and in conversation she focuses on explaining how she is improving her life and giving her children the best possible chance. Zena is juggling many different roles: mother, provider, and working professional. From the ages of 16-22 she was heavily addicted to crack cocaine. Her oldest child, a daughter, was born before she began to use drugs, and her youngest child, a son, was born after her rehabilitation. She has spent most of her life in New York City, growing up in upper Manhattan and the Bronx. Currently she is reunited with her six children, and a sick grandfather has recently came to stay with the family. Last year, she was diagnosed with diabetes and this summer she started working as a hospital assistant as part of BEGIN, one of New York City's work preparation programs.

Zena's interest in FLITE began when she found out that her youngest son could be learning at home with a "teacher." This is particularly important to Zena because:

> *I wanted my baby at home. I didn't have time with my other kids, and I wanted it with him and I wanted to experience things together. This was a chance for me to learn about things that they [my children] were supposed to be doing. It will help him learn how to do better in school. He'll have more activities that he will want to be involved in. He now knows how to write his name. When the kids are doing their homework, he comes and grabs the papers and he wants to be a part of it! When it is time for everybody to study, he goes and grabs his books and he studies, too. He has his own set of books from FLITE.*

Although FLITE directly focused on supporting Zena's youngest son through home visits, she describes the impact these visits have had on her other children:

> *It's helped them do more with him. He has a crate of books right now from FLITE. And he sits down and sometimes you think*

that he knows that story, but they read to him from the book, and the children read to him at home. There was a situation that put him and my oldest [age 16] together, a book called Growing Up with Sisters and Brothers. Like leave your big sister alone, or something. It's giving us all time to do stuff...that weren't done with the other children. I didn't have this with them.

Zena did not remember her mother reading books to her or encouraging her to express herself when she was growing up:

It was sit down, do your homework, go to school. I'm thinking of writing a book about my life. I tried to be different and that led me to using drugs and stuff.

Zena is becoming the mother and provider she wants to be through the help of FLITE home visits, parenting workshops, field trips, and, most importantly, her one-on-one contact with various staff. Excerpts from the journal of Zena's family worker, Marilyn La Roche, illustrate the impact these relationships have had on Zena as a learner:

Zena is an incredible woman, who I visit on Wednesdays. When I pick literature for my families I usually like to use a book, article, or poem that I feel might interest them. Because of who I see Zena as, I picked the poem "Phenomenal Woman," by Maya Angelou. I saw this not only as something to read, but as a gift to her...After reading the piece, she thanked me and said she wanted to share this with someone else. What stood out for me was her reaction to my giving her this poem. She was not only touched but I felt she felt inspired. Afterwards we discussed working on her self-image collage together. I'm hoping we can work on her own image of herself and at the same time I could do a collage of how I see her as a person. Then we could compare and see how much they differ or how much they are alike. Feedback, feedback!

These words, in which a poem is at once a gift, a comment, and an opportunity for reading, describe the way in which family workers and parents place literacy within the relationships they build with each other. They also reveal the way in which home visits are designed to focus on the individual learner. In conversation Marilyn said:

I just found her very inspirational because she hit bottom and was able to pull herself out of it. When I first met her she told me that she wanted to be a doctor, but that she had messed up so badly that she couldn't get any financial aid. I felt like no one should close the door on this woman because she had a lot to give.

Marilyn wrote in her journal:

...this visit helped to inspire me. I know there are different ways to use literacy in the home without putting pressure on those who don't feel comfortable with it. There are times when you have to back away and try to find other ways to have reading or writing time during the visits.

This experience is as much about developing a reciprocal teaching and learning relationship as it is about reading and writing. The relationship between Zena and Marilyn kept Zena involved in FLITE. It provided encouragement for her to continue having access to resources and to provide her children with educational opportunities.

This experience with her family worker during home visits prompted Zena to want to record her life:

She [the family worker] brought me the poem "Phenomenal Woman" and I looked at it and I said, "That's me," even if it's for other people, too. I've always needed to feel like I was somebody and she made me feel just like that. I am so proud of myself and she was always saying "Sit down and write that." I started my book, but I can't seem to sit down and get into it like I need to. But I have pages at home of what I started. The title of it is Life of a Ghetto Girl.

Zena describes how she uses writing to express herself as she discusses how she became a writer:

Experiencing different things. I don't see myself as a writer but I have to express myself. I find that I express myself better on paper instead of talking. I can have nothing to say, but give me a piece of paper and it all comes out ... I am always reading things and writing things. That's why I don't understand why I didn't finish high school. Well, it was because of my activities.

In addition to the value she found in the program's home visits, Zena found the parenting workshops helpful:

> *...I was having problems. I had my kids and my sister's child, who was acting out badly. My ten-year-old was beating up principals and teachers. He was in special ed. I was pulling out my hair with all of them. [The workshops] helped me to talk out what was going on, and to realize that I was not the only parent going through these problems. When other people are going through the same problems, it doesn't make it as bad. You can laugh at what is happening, actually.*

She reported on arriving at new parenting strategies with her children:

> *Learning not to scream. I am more patient with them. I try to give each one some different time. For example, I will try to spend time with each one separately. The baby I spend a lot of time with because he is still in the house with me. But the oldest and I will go out shopping together. When I take them shopping I like to take just that child. I try to spend more time just talking to them to know what they are feeling. But not talking at them, talking to each other.*

The sharing generated by the home visits and the parenting workshops not only enabled Zena to expand her strategies as a parent but to communicate more easily with principals and teachers.

FLITE built on Zena's need to "feel like I was somebody" by placing Zena at the center of her learning experiences. The openness with which home visits are designed allowed for deliberate planning based on the family worker's understanding of Zena as an individual. In the parenting class, sharing her issues as a mother allowed Zena to create new understandings about herself and her children.

Evelyn Lopez

Evelyn Lopez is a soft-spoken, 32 year-old single mother of five. She recently started in New York City's BEGIN program, which requires her to work part-time in order to collect public assistance benefits. Evelyn's childhood was spent in a succession of group homes and foster care

arrangements. She explains that she never really grew up in a family: "I used to go from place to place, my mother was not really around. And I never really got into school because I was moved a lot." She finished 10th grade, but had been unable to complete work toward her GED until she joined the FLITE program's BE class. She was motivated to join because, she says, she wanted to become a better parent, and a better teacher to her children, to further her own education, and to obtain her GED in the hopes of securing a job.

Evelyn learned about FLITE when her sister-in-law, a school volunteer, showed her a flyer about the adult education classes the program offers at P.S. 40. Her GED became increasingly important to her as her daughter approached high school. She recounted her difficult decision to return to school:

> *At first, I was like, I don't think so, I'm too old. And I didn't know how they did it, like what was your last grade...And I am terrified of tests and so I called and I spoke to a FLITE worker, and she was real nice. I told her I hadn't been to school for years, that I'm 31. And she said "Don't worry, just come on in." My daughter was four then and I asked if they had daycare. So everything was great so far. And I walked in and some of the people were a little older than me and my shock went away. I was still scared but I said let me give it a try. It won't hurt, I'm not doing anything now. And it worked, out, I liked it!*

Azi Ellowitch, Evelyn's BE teacher, recorded her progress throughout the year:

> Evelyn began the FLITE class in February 1995. ...she was a good reader but rarely found time to read. From her pre- and post self-assessments, we know that when Evelyn entered that program the only reading she did consistently was bedtime reading to her children. After spending time in the GED class, she began reading novels for herself. Then she reported that she was passing the novels along to her daughter. In February, [Evelyn] responded to the question, "How do you feel when you write?" with the following, "It depends. if I know what Im doing Im o.k. If I don't, then I just don't want to deal with it." In June, 1995, she responded to the same question, "I feel good when I write because sometime it lets me let out how I feel. Sometime it helps me keep my mind on things."

The FLITE BE teacher was able to help Evelyn see the connection between what was going on in her everyday life and her educational progress; she began to use writing as a way to address her home issues:

> *There were times when I walked in and she [the BE teacher] knew right away that something was wrong. And she would say, "Do you want to write me a little note?" I would say, "I can't do this today," and she would say, "Write about it." And then she would write me back. It felt good.*

Writing about her own life has contributed to Evelyn's increased confidence in her academic abilities. One of these short journal entries was a piece she expanded into a narrative of her son Anthony's birth, which has been published in the FLITE journal, *Reflections of Unforgettable Moments*, and is included here as an appendix.

Evelyn explored many facets of her life and her children's lives through her journal writing and BE class work. As Luz did, she began to see writing as a way of communicating with her teenage daughters:

> *They started to [write in their journals] when they got punished. They would pass something along saying, "Here, give this to Mom." And I would write back. That is when they knew they could ask me a question.*

As Evelyn overcame her fears and inhibitions as a learner, she saw herself as a role model for her two teenage daughters:

> *I'm more or less a single parent. So it's important for me to point my kids in the right direction. Before there were times when my daughter would tell me to help her with her homework and I didn't know it... It's so embarrassing. That is another reason I wanted to go back to school. But that was also another reason why I was so afraid when I came to FLITE. I thought, "What if I can't do it?" And I didn't want to go home and tell my daughter, "Well, it didn't work out with school." Because then she is going to get the wrong idea that school is not important. I am going to school and I am doing this for myself. But in a way I am doing it for them, too. Because I don't want them to say, well, she is home doing nothing.*

Evelyn describes another aspect of this:

I never saw myself as a role model for my girls. I guess because we are usually disagreeing on something, like I'm the Mommy and they are the children. It felt kind of funny. [Now] I say, "Did you do your homework, 'cause I'm going to do mine and we will see who finishes first!"

In addition to the impact Evelyn's involvement in BE had on her views of herself as a learner and a parent, her family's involvement in home visits has affected their interactions with one another at home. She says:

When Jennifer would have her home visits, she would show my other daughters her book when they came home from school. They will end up reading it and my son who is seven will be like, "How come I don't get no home visits?" He'll get a little jealous but I will talk to him and he really got into it. And there is Anthony, who has cerebral palsy, and he is home on weekends. Jennifer will read to Anthony the books that she gets. They love music and stories so she will make up her own. She knows the story by heart by the end of the week so she will tell him the stories.

Asked how she thought her youngest daughter benefits from the home visits, day care and family trips, Evelyn says, "Jennifer has found a best friend and is now less shy." Today Evelyn is working on completing her GED and has enrolled her youngest child in Head Start.

Juana Quintero

Juana Quintero is a single parent new to the United States who is struggling to make a place for herself and her children in the neighborhood. She recently emigrated from the Dominican Republic with her two small children, Isabel and Elba, and successfully extricated herself from an abusive relationship. Her third child, Hector, was born in America. Her highest level of schooling was the 5th grade.

Through a friend, Juana heard that FLITE offered adult ESOL classes that would support her application for U.S. citizenship and would furnish home visits for her middle child, who was then two. Because her new baby was not yet old enough to be eligible for the FLITE nursery, she paid a baby-sitter for several months while she attended ESOL classes. Juana's family worker, Daisy Aponte, interpreted interviews conducted with

Juana for this case study. Daisy conveys why the ESOL classes were important in helping Juana make the transition to America:

> *[She says] they helped her very much because thanks to the ESOL classes she was able to become a U.S. citizen. They helped her learn about how to write a sentence. She may not understand like we do, but when she receives a letter about an appointment, she understands English now.*

As she began to receive home visits, Juana's involvement with FLITE expanded to include the educational needs of her young children. She wants her children to thrive in America and feels that learning English and staying in school are the keys. Daisy notes:

> *She would like her daughters to learn more English. Here is when they start their future goals so she hopes that they teach them as much as they can so that when they get to high school they know a lot.*

Daisy Aponte reports Juana's enthusiasm about another aspect of the program:

> *The home visitor spends half the time to be with the child to show them about colors, painting, different kinds of activities. And she says it has helped her because she doesn't have that time to share with her child. The fact that the home visitor comes to her home, that is something special to her. That is what helps her make time.*

Juana confronted the task of learning to read and write in a new language with limited literacy skills. Daisy Aponte explains how she was trying to prepare her children for school:

> *...[she] reads to them but not all the time. She baby-sits and she is busy. She tries to read with her two oldest. When they are walking in the neighborhood they focus on the signs and try to read signs.*

According to Daisy, the home visits also helped Juana interact with her children and learn more about child development:

[She says] she observes the way we deal with the children in the home and the way we work with them and that has helped her. Before she didn't realize that there was time for her and her [older] daughter to interact and communicate better. She would just do the dishes, and you know, cooking, cleaning, and didn't worry about sharing time with her daughter. She now knows she can make time and she wants to.

Juana maintains that the FLITE home visits helped her daughter, Isabel, become excited about school. Daisy interprets Juana's view of this:

She takes books and pretends she is reading even though she doesn't know what she is reading and she does a lot of dramatic play. She is really familiarized with all the teachers. And sometimes in the morning she asks her mother to bring her to school.

Daisy describes her own perspective about Juana and her children:

The way she accepted me into her home...I see her as a mother, not as like I am coming in here, I am a teacher. She works with me and we see each other at the same level. I feel really comfortable with her. She baby-sits Alex, her neighbor's child, and she used to tell me that she was having a hard time coming out to the street because Alex would run away from her; she had that fear, and sometimes she would say, "I would like to go to the park with my daughter but I don't dare." She wouldn't even dare cross the street with Alex. I think that through our conversations it has helped her to feel more confident about herself dealing with the children. I would share my experiences as a mother with her. We would communicate a lot, open.

In my home visits Isabel really enjoyed reading. I did an agenda and I try to keep it like that, so Isabel would know when I was going to get there and we would read together and she knew when it was reading time and she would ask me for the book. I think she is a really together child. The baby, he would sit on the floor next to Isabel during the home visits, but he knew it was reading time and he would want to participate.

Isabel has overcome a lot. I remember when she first started in the nursery class. She was always crying, she wouldn't have a snack. And now she is so independent—just get me started and I will continue.

Daisy Aponte describes a home visit with Juana:

She likes the journal writing, because sometimes she communicates through the journal writing. Sometimes I will bring articles or a title for her to write about and she would be anxious because she didn't know what to write or how to write, or how to start, but then once she started more things would come to mind.

She writes a little bit but what she likes better is reading. She likes magazines and she sometimes reads the books that her older daughter brings home from school. When she takes her children to the appointments, they give you reading stuff. She usually reads in Spanish but when she gets something in English, she tries to read it, even if she doesn't say it correctly.

Daisy conveys Juana's description of how her involvement in the program helped connect her to the larger community:

[Before] she would see [her life] just as a routine. She would bring her daughter to school, and walk back to the house, coming back in the afternoon to pick her up. ...there was no life for her. Now she is more involved in the program. She would just...watch soap operas and she didn't realize that there was more than that out there.

Juana had different reasons for participating in various FLITE components. While ESOL supported her application for U.S. citizenship, which she hoped would provide security for her family, the home visits were an important source of encouragement through conversations about parenting.

Discussion of Case Studies

Together, these case studies illustrate the impressive range and variety of the participants' uses for literacy. Some of the literacy behaviors that they develop are school-like; some center on their children; others focus entirely on the mother. Similarly, the case studies convey the diversity of the participants' points of entry into the program; in each case, different FLITE components serve as the first contact and attraction. The range of benefits that children receive from their family's engagement in the program is also apparent. Finally, we see how the participants' learning experiences and literacy behaviors are continually enriched and intensified by the element of reciprocity between parents and children and between families and FLITE staff.

The Benefits to Children

The FLITE program enhanced children's lives in various ways. The child- and literacy-development focus of the parenting and home visiting components, and the ripple effect of parents' own positive educational experiences in BE and ESOL classes led to the following effects on preschoolers and children of other ages.

Preschool children

- Elizabeth, Luz's daughter, became an active participant in the nursery class and, through home visits, began to learn through a variety of experiences offered her through the program;
- Zena's young son developed an interest in reading and writing through home visits and those interests became linked to the role of literacy in the informal routines of his home;
- Evelyn's four-year-old, Jennifer, established friendships by participating in the group settings of the nursery class and the program trips. Jennifer also transformed reading time from an isolated home visit activity into a routine involving her siblings; and,
- Juana's daughter Isabel developed a sense of independence through her involvement in the nursery classroom. Home visits

created time for Juana and Isabel to spend together and supported Isabel's early literacy development.

Other children

- Luz's own development as a learner supported her sixth-grade daughter's learning. Luz also was able to work with her seven-year-old son on issues concerning his behavior;
- Zena began spending time alone with each of her children. The older children created time to read with their younger brother;
- Evelyn and her daughter, a junior high school student, maintained a journal as a place to communicate with each other. School work created reading and writing routines in Evelyn's household which supported her as a role model for her older daughters; and,
- Juana's experiences with home visits helped her to create time for focused engagement with her older children.

While these case studies identify a variety of benefits to individual children, the descriptions of the four parents all depict re-shaped relationships between mothers and children. As the examples illustrate, this re-shaping is supported by heightened communication among family members, by focused attention on children, and by other conditions in and out of the home that support literacy development.

Multiple Points of Entry

The four case studies indicate the value of having multiple entry points and learning forums in family literacy programs. These parents' stories map how the first contact with a program component matched their initial needs and provided the support necessary to explore other program options as their needs changed. As a result, the parents ventured further into their own and their children's learning:

- Luz joined FLITE's home visiting component because she wanted to see her daughter engaged in a positive educational experience. Her ensuing involvement in the BE class and the parenting workshops grew from her interests in helping her children to

succeed and evolved into an enthusiasm for her own educational development;

- Similarly, Zena's participation in FLITE began with home visits as a way of addressing her desire to experience learning with her youngest son. Zena quickly involved herself in the parenting workshops as she found in them the support she wanted as a parent interested in exploring ways of interacting with her children;
- Evelyn joined the program primarily to fulfill her own educational goal of obtaining her GED and subsequently saw the impact her learning had on her children; and,
- Juana's involvement in the program's ESOL class centered on her own needs as she made the transition to life in the United States and then extended to the needs of her children.

The Range of Literacy Behaviors

These parents engaged in a wide variety of reading, writing, and talking activities for various purposes. Collectively, they:

- read children's literature, newspapers, novels, poetry, and action books;
- read to or with their children, partners, and family workers;
- established homework routines with their children and assisted them with their school work;
- wrote in journals with their adult education instructors to explore issues of concern to them;
- wrote in journals with their children to further communication;
- wrote to explore feelings and issues of identity;
- worked toward completing GED and citizenship studies;
- developed understandings of English; and,
- interacted with the larger school and neighborhood community.

These case studies suggest ways in which particular practices have taken root and become Heath's (1991) "literacy behaviors." The families they describe have established ways of living with reading, writing, and talking that affect both parent and child.

Reciprocal Learning Relationships

What underlies the range and variation of literacy behaviors reflected in these case studies is the idea that diverse learning contexts enable participants to experience the power of shared learning in different ways. Traditional family literacy programs often see learning moving from parent to child, but several innovators in the field of family literacy point out how frequently learning is reciprocal (Strickland and Taylor, 1989; Auerbach, 1995): a parent, for example, can learn from her child.

In the FLITE program, learning occurs in non-hierarchical and shared settings for parents, children, and family workers:

- Luz's interest in reading was developed in part by the reading experiences she shared with her family worker;
- Zena was relieved to find other parents facing struggles similar to her own. Hearing other perspectives helped her to broaden her view of options for addressing issues related to her children;
- The one-on-one relationship of the home visit allowed Zena's family worker to bring a poem she thought would be of particular interest to Zena;
- Just as one family worker discovered that her own learning allows her to assist others better, Evelyn began to see the relationship between her own learning and her role as a model for her children;
- Evelyn's experience with her BE teacher and her journal expanded to her household as she introduced writing to her family as a way of communicating and sharing experiences;
- Juana and her children learn English together as they walk in their neighborhood and read the street signs; and,
- Juana, Evelyn, Zena, and Luz all describe ways in which younger and older siblings bring opportunities for learning to each other.

The case studies suggest that learning can take place in a variety of ways both in the program and at home. These parents' experiences illustrate that in the FLITE program learning is not uni-directional, but reciprocal and shared among parents, children, and staff.

The Future of Family Literacy Programs

We believe that the experience gained in the FLITE program has implications for other family literacy and family support programs as well.

What made reciprocal learning possible?

Employing women from the community as family workers was essential to developing shared learning environments. The family workers' familiarity with community issues as well as their deepening sense of themselves as learners were important elements in their non-hierarchical view of the role of family worker. This perspective was supported by staff development, which drew on the family workers' experiences, questions, and ideas as a foundation for learning about literacy development educational practice.

What supported a range of literacy behaviors?

All of the program's components offered extended opportunities for talk, negotiating text, and examining real-life issues and questions. This program coherence was coupled with an openness of design that encouraged participants to involve themselves at their own pace and in response to their evolving needs.

What made multiple entry points possible?

The program's comprehensiveness and flexibility encouraged participants to consider how program components matched their particular needs. The program not only recognized the diversity of participants' aspirations, but also acknowledged their changing nature.

How were benefits to children supported?

Having a substantial impact on children does not necessarily mean working with them directly. In the FLITE program, we found that attending to adults' learning and to their developing confidence resulted in parents' focused engagement with children, broadened opportunities

for literacy learning, and deepening communication among family members.

Finally, structures for staff development, which also served as processes for formative evaluation, allowed the FLITE program to consider participants' needs and educational practice in an ongoing manner. For example, to move the program's work forward, staff development focused on staff's own experiences with and questions about child- and literacy-development. The responsiveness and fluidity of staff development supported staff's growth as readers, writers, and practitioners. Such formative evaluation can help programs stay aware of how a range of literacy behaviors can be supported by creating various contexts for learning. By engaging in such a spirited process, family literacy programs can evolve in ways that constantly draw upon the strengths and interests of their staff members and participants.

APPENDIX

Evelyn's writing about her son from *Reflections of Unforgettable Moments:*

Anthony

I don't like to judge people by the way they look because I guess you could say that I learned not to. Before my son Anthony was born I might have judged, without knowing I was even judging someone—for example the way they dressed, acted, or just the way they looked. My son Anthony is handicapped. So he talks a little funny and moves his body around a little funny. After he was born and I found out that he was going to be physically handicapped, I started seeing things differently.

I was twenty when I had Anthony. He was two months premature. His father was in the army reserve. And during my pregnancy I didn't get a lot of support from him. Aside from his drinking all the time and trying to decide whether or not he was ready to grow up, he was basically a good guy. I guess Anthony Jr. was his first and my third, he was nervous about being a father. Anyway, two days before I had my baby I got a really bad asthma attack. I had a hard time trying to breathe. My next door neighbor offered to watch my daughters while I went to the hospital. When I went to the hospital, I didn't know that my water had been broken for two days. I thought that since my belly was low, it was hitting my blatter, and I just didn't make it to the bathroom. I had slight pains all night and the next day I finally started to push and still no sign of Anthony Sr. When the baby came, I had another attack. I couldn't breathe. I saw the baby come out. Then they took him away. That's when I knew something went wrong.

I awakened two days later. I didn't know two days had passed already. Then I saw Anthony Sr. sitting there. I asked where my baby was, but no one said anything. They didn't want me to get upset and have another attack. I went to look for my baby on my own. I knew he was just a baby, but I had to let him know I was there for him—that everything was going to be alright.

I asked the nurse where they kept the sick babies and she told me it was upstairs. When I went upstairs I saw the doctor. He let me see the baby only because I had a fit and he was afraid I might have another attack. When I first walked in the room, I saw all these incubators with little, tiny figures. Then I saw an incubator that said "baby boy M."

At first I was afraid to look in it. But something in side of me just said he's your son and he needs you. I thought about me not having my parents and in just a couple of seconds all these thoughts came to my mind. Finally I looked and there he was. I thought, he's so tiny. He weighed 5 lbs. In fact, the doctor said that's what probably saved him. I couldn't see his face but I didn't care. I was just happy he was there. The doctor said the next couple days were critical. I was with my baby every chance I could. But then it was time for me to go home. Without my son.

Anthony was upset because the doctor told us that if the baby made it, he could have some kind of handicap. Anthony Jr. stayed in the hospital for four months. His father went to see him maybe three times. One time they didn't let him in because he was so drunk. I guess that he didn't want to accept that his little boy wasn't going to be perfect. But to me he was. I would take him no matter how God sent him to me.

Anthony and I broke up the first month after the baby was born. I knew he couldn't accept his son for what he might be like, so I decided to deal with the baby and my girls by myself. Sometimes I would take the girls to the hospital with me. The nurses would watch them for me while I spent some time with Anthony Jr. The girls were three and four. After a while the nurses would know why I was there and offer to watch the girls while I went to see him.

On the third month the baby was there, a social worker came to see me. She said she wanted to talk about some options she said I had concerning Anthony Jr. She said if I took Anthony home it would get harder for me to deal with him and his seizures. And since his lungs were not fully developed, he was going to be handicapped and may have some kind of deformity. And that I might want to consider adoption or a nursing home. In my mind I was thinking this lady sees me as a twenty year old mom who already has two daughters and is too young and inexperienced to be able to handle a sick child. I let her know that even though I grew up in foster care and group homes there was nothing wrong with me. Besides, what made her think someone is going to want a sick baby when a healthy child can't even get adopted? I also told her there was no way I was going to give up my son without even trying. I was determined to prove this lady wrong.

Finally it was going to be New Years. Anthony came home.

Anthony and I have since gone through changes with him in and out of the hospital and he's gotten older and bigger and harder to deal with. I did have to place him in a special school for the handicapped. But he does come home on weekends and we're still together.

Anthony is eleven now. He isn't big for his age; he's in a wheelchair and is about 38 lbs. Although he can't walk or move his arms wherever he wants them to go he always finds a way to grab on to something without even trying. He can say about five words that I can understand, although he tries real hard. It's a struggle for him when he's asked a question; for example "Are you wet?" He blinks for yes and doesn't do anything for no, just looks and smiles. He's got a beautiful smile which I think he knows because I tell him a lot and every time I walk by he smiles.

If you could see past his wheelchair and handicap like I do, you would know that God couldn't have given me anything more special than my son Anthony.

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